CENTENNIAL NOTE

Ohio Geography in the One Hundred Years of The Ohio Academy of Science

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INTRODUCTION

As the Ohio Academy of Science enters its second century, geography is alive and well in Ohio. This assessment is tempered by concerns, but on the whole 1991 finds the profession solidly established at the state universities and a part of the curriculum in a number of other colleges as well. This brief review addresses both the subject and profession over the past and present, and includes some projections about the future. In light of the venue, the main focus is on links between geographers and The Ohio Academy of Science. Attention is, nonetheless, also given to a wider context.

GEOGRAPHY IN OHIO: PAST AND PRESENT

During this century and especially over the past 60 years, Ohio geographers, individually and collectively, have contributed actively to their profession and to the sciences in general. A major part of these contributions has been the training of thousands of geography majors at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. These graduates in turn have achieved success literally worldwide in academic, business, and government positions. Such programs have benefitted in recent years from the active efforts of the various departments, from a growing recognition of the values of a geography background, and from the proven competence of earlier graduates in a wide variety of occupations. Responses from a number of departments across the state indicate that enrollments generally are strong and the number of majors is increasing. In 1990, eight departments had master's programs and three of these, Cincinnati, Kent State University, and The Ohio State University, also offered the doctoral degree.

In 1989, courses regarded as geography were offered in 25 Ohio colleges and universities, with a total state enrollment of 35,278 students. This figure placed Ohio second in the country, well below first place California's 59,608, but also well ahead of third place Illinois' 28,231 (Walker 1990). As may be expected, The Ohio State University led with over 5,000 students; however, six other state universities had totals exceeding 3,000 students. Outside the state universities, geography programs were strongest at Denison, Ohio Wesleyan, and Wittenberg. Separate departments of geography exist in 14 of the state's institutions. At three others, the department title included geography and, elsewhere, courses were offered under such department names as geology, earth science, history, or social science. Regardless of the label, it is the content that is important.

In the interest of proper education, we would prefer that all college degrees include a geography component, although we are pleased that so many colleges in the state now at least offer students the opportunity. The greatest concern, however, is with the widespread lack of knowledge of geography among Ohio high school students. By any measure, and the press has reported some astounding levels of ignorance, the nation's youth in general have a poor understanding of geography of any sort. During recent decades, a geography course was not even an option in most high schools in Ohio, and few college-oriented students had exposure to geography. The result is a woeful lack of knowledge and understanding of the world.

This weakness in education was recognized in an article in *The Ohio Journal of Science* in 1983 (Noble and Harnapp) along with the recommendation that university geographers establish a dialogue on the matter with elementary and secondary level teachers. The Ohio Academy of Science gave emphasis to the problem when its Executive Officer, Mr. Lynn E. Elfner, asked the Geography section to arrange a symposium titled "Geography in Pre-College Education in Ohio" for the 1988 Annual Meeting.

Progress has begun through the efforts of the newly established Ohio Geographic Alliance that works in conjunction with the National Geographic Society. Even so, the magnitude of the task suggests that at least a decade of work will be needed to assess the level of success. The broad scope of this professional interest in the content of public school curricula constitutes a new direction for collegiate geographers in Ohio and contains the potential to greatly strengthen general appreciation of the discipline.

GEOGRAPHER PARTICIPATION IN THE OHIO ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Geography has been part of the activities of The Ohio Academy of Science since its inception in 1891 (Noble and Harnapp 1983) although not all participants over that long span have been professional geographers. Through 1990, only 53 articles identifiable as geographical in content were published in *The Ohio Journal of Science*. Just two of these were prior to 1930, with the remainder published since the establishment of a separate Geography Section in the Academy in 1932. Only in the decade 1960-69 was the average less than about one a year. Clearly the *Journal* has been a recognized outlet for research by Ohio geographers. Efforts are being made by the Academy and by Ohio geographers to broaden participation in the *Journal* as a source of published geographic research.

The contributors have been from 12 different colleges and universities. The largest number of contributors were affiliated with The Ohio State University and The University of Toledo, with eight each. Kent State, Bowling Green, Akron, and Oberlin each contributed 5-6 articles. Other small colleges represented, besides Oberlin, have been Denison, Ohio Wesleyan, and Wooster. As is the nature of geography, the topics have been diverse, with the largest number (14 articles) on physical themes. During the 1930s

and 1940s, research themes included physiography, urban and regional studies, and agriculture. In more recent decades, these categories were absent and studies on micro-climatology, social geography, and locational analysis have appeared.

In comparison with these modest contributions to the *Journal*, geographers have been much more active in their research presentations at the annual meetings of The Ohio Academy of Science. The first 50 years of the Geography Section were described and analyzed by Noble and Harnapp in 1983. As with articles in the *Journal*, such papers varied in numbers and content annually, but the total participation was much higher. The number of papers given over that period was more than 10 for most years, with the largest numbers in 1969 and 1978. An updating of that study shows that 144 papers were presented during Ohio Academy of Science meetings from 1982 through 1990. The range was from only 9 in 1985 to 21 in 1982. This mean of 16 papers a year reflects a wide and growing appreciation among Ohio geographers of the worth of The Ohio Academy of Science sessions.

MAJOR EVENTS FOR GEOGRAPHY IN THE OHIO ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Over its history, The Ohio Academy of Science has chosen two geographers as its president. Guy-Harold Smith of Ohio State University served in 1961-62 and Allen G. Noble of the University of Akron in 1989-90. In addition to his success in building a major department during his 29 years as chair of geography at Ohio State University, Guy-Harold Smith held a national reputation in aspects of population geography, conservation, and cartography.

Allen Noble also helped to create a vigorous geography program as department chair at the University of Akron. In addition to an active role in the governance of the Association of American Geographers, Noble has a prolific publication record. His interests are varied, with a particular concern with cultural landscape research and Third World development and urbanization, especially that of Asia. He and his colleague Lawrence Ma were mainly responsible for the U.S.-China exchange in 1977 and 1978. Sponsored by The Ohio Academy of Science, it was the first non-government organized scientific exchange since World War II. In 1977, a group of American geographers visited China, with a return visit by a group of Chinese geographers in 1978. The highlight of the Chinese visit was a dinner hosted by The Ohio Academy of Science at The Ohio State University in Columbus, OH, attended by members from most disciplines.

THE FUTURE OF GEOGRAPHY IN OHIO

Entering the decade of the 1990s, the interests of geographers and the thrusts of geography departments in Ohio display the same sort of diversity that has long made the profession fascinating to its practitioners. The techniques of statistical analysis and modeling, computer mapping, remote sensing, and the extensive use of computers, are standard procedures. The development and application of geographic information systems (GIS) is occurring at a rapid pace at most major departments in the state. However, the traditional approaches in geography still flourish and are often integrated with newer methods in geographic analysis.

Geography has maintained its traditional emphasis in the study of world regions. It has maintained strong ties with various area studies programs. With rapid political and social changes, and the globalization of world economies, an understanding of different cultures and regions of the world is increasingly important and geography has a major role to play in this objective.

Geography has always been interested in the interrelationships between human beings and the environment, and Ohio geographers are no exception. Most major departments report a growing student interest in weather and climate and have adjusted their programs and equipment acquisitions accordingly.

In recent years geographers are paying increasing attention to applied geography. This represents an effort by geographers to use their knowledge and skills in solving practical problems and avail the profession to opportunities in non-academic areas. Each department can provide a long list of graduates now working in business and government in jobs such as population studies, marketing research, locational analysis, urban and regional planning, environmental planning, and cartography. A growing number of geography faculty also are proving their value as consultants. Associated with these changes is an expansion, statewide, in the number of geography interns. Overall, such trends appear to be healthy ones for the discipline.

CONCLUSION

As was stated at the outset, the current status of geography in Ohio appears to be solid, and the prospects for the future are encouraging. Such optimism has two bases: one is the growing awareness among the public that ignorance even of elementary geography is widespread, and the other is the increasing recognition of the value of geographic knowledge and techniques in approaching a variety of issues in the world. Both government and businesses are being forced to approach their usual concerns in international terms. Geography can only benefit from such awakening.

LITERATURE CITED

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